

Backgammon

A close-up photograph of a backgammon board with a textured orange surface. In the foreground, there are several pieces: a large black cylindrical piece, a stack of four black circular pieces, a stack of three orange circular pieces, and a black cube with orange faces showing the number 32. Two translucent orange dice are also visible on the board.

"How to Win 5-pt Matches"

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Opening Remarks

- Deyong's Theory of Dice
- Four Factors
 - The Score
 - Cube Handling
 - Checker Play
 - Opponent Factor
- Luck and Skill



Match Equity

“Understanding Match Equity is fundamental to becoming a really successful tournament player”



Match Equity Table

Red Needs

Blue
Needs

	1	2	3	4	5
1	50	70	75	83	85
2	30	50	60	68	75
3	25	40	50	59	66
4	17	32	41	50	58
5	15	25	34	42	50



Calculating Match Equities

There are at least four methods:

- **Janowski Formula:**

- $\text{Winning Chances} = 50 + (D * 85) / (T + 6)$

- where D = difference in scores

- T = number of points needed by trailer

- **Underwood Formula**

- **Neil's Numbers**

- **Kleinman's Formula**



The Doubling Spectrum

Game Winning Chances

0% ←————→ 100%

No Double/Take	Double/Take	Double/Pass	Too Good to Double/Pass
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Doubling Window



Doubling Window

- The doubling window is the range of winning percentages between which the correct action is double and take.
- In a money game that window is normally 50% to 77%
- In match play the size of the window is dictated by the score.
- When leading the window can be very narrow (or non-existent)
- When trailing you can sometimes double when you aren't even the favourite!



Match Play Basics

“The nuts and bolts of playing tournament matches.”



General Points

- The Crawford Rule is always used. Once the Crawford Game is over the trailer **must double** at the first opportunity.
- The Free Drop. After the Crawford Game if you are leading 4-1 or 4-3 you have a free drop as your opponent still needs to win the same number of games. With any disadvantage exercise your free drop immediately.
- Free Redouble. If you are doubled by your opponent and the cube reaches a level that means he would win the match if he won the game then you must redouble to 4 (or 8) as it will cost you nothing and may gain hugely.



Basic Tactics

- When leading play for simple positions such as races and holding games. This reduces the gammon risk.
- When trailing play for complex positions, especially prime-vs-prime as these generate more gammons. Blitzes are also good.
- Your play of some opening rolls is no longer optional. When ahead split, when behind slot. How should you play 21, 41, 51, 32, 43, 54, 64?



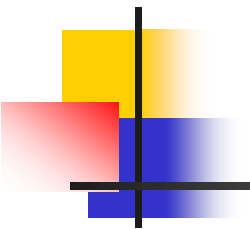
Basic Doubling

- Never be afraid to double – your opponent can't make a mistake if you don't give him the opportunity!
- Remember Woolsey's Law – if you're not 100% that your opponent has a take then it is always correct to double!
- Conversely never be afraid to take if the situation demands it. Fear dominates cube handling in most matches.
- Early in a long match cube decisions and playing strategies are as for money. In a 5-pt match the score influences nearly every doubling decision!



Handling Specific Scores

“Most scores in a 5-pt match require specific tactics and you need to learn the most common ones.”

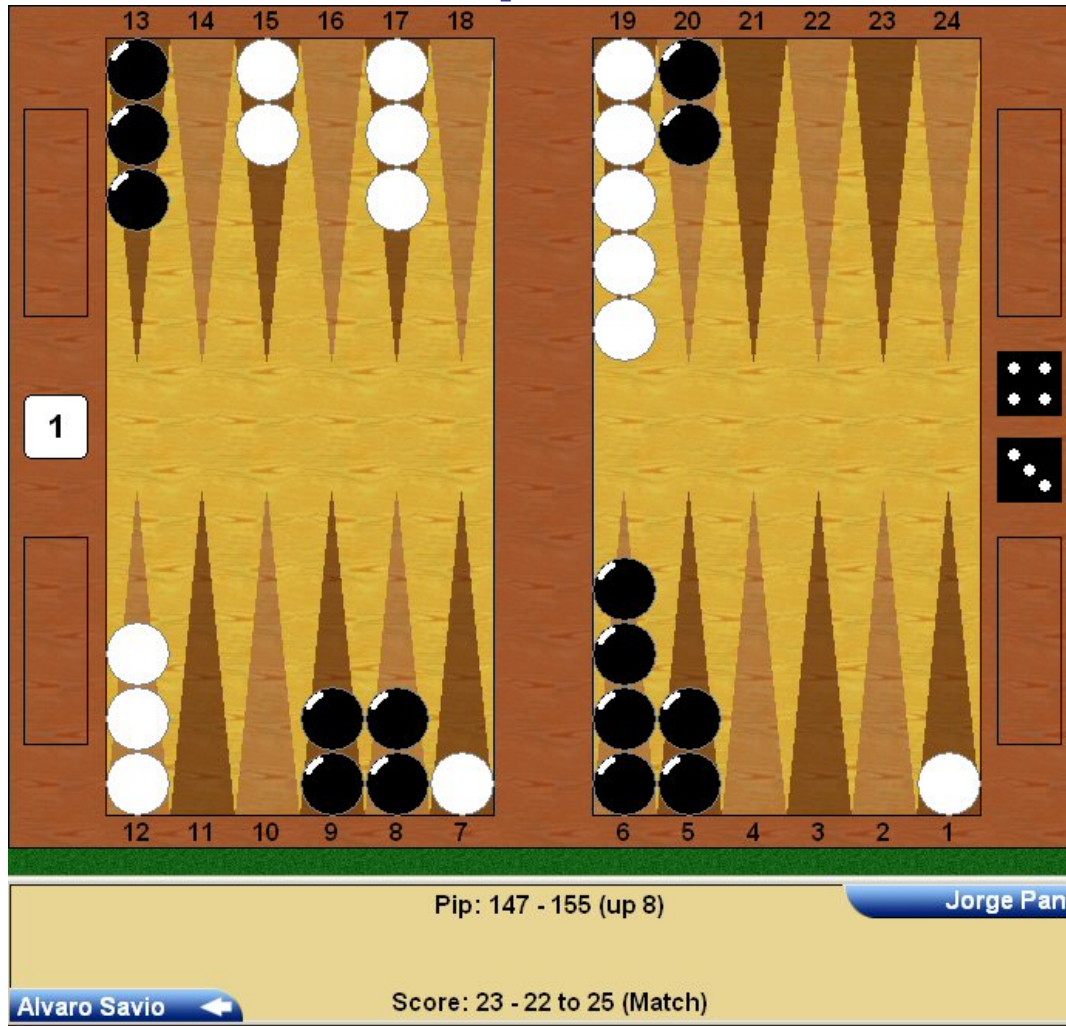


3-2

3-2 is not a huge lead (you are 60% favourite)

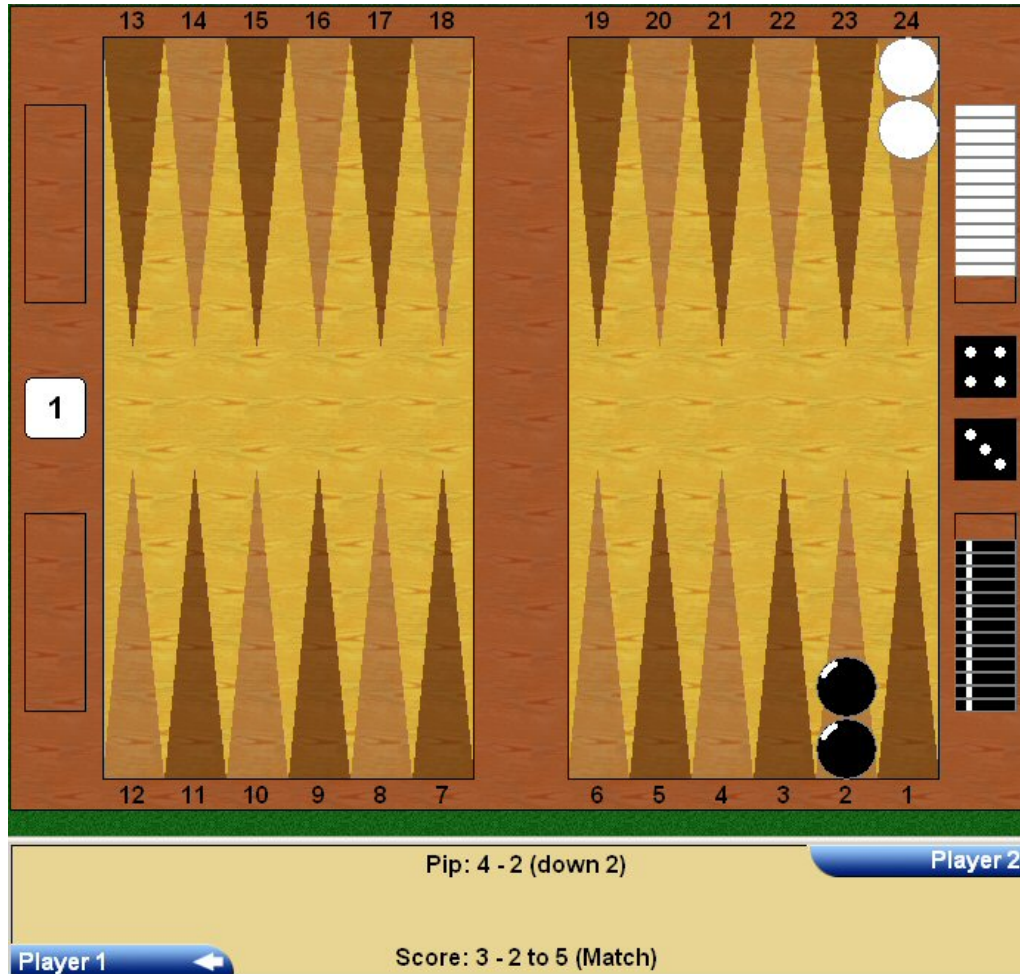
- Leader:
 - With a gammon threat play for an undoubled gammon
 - In non-gammonish position the trailer's take point is 25% (but with no recube vig as he has already redoubled) so double as per money
- Trailer:
 - Double much earlier than usual as trailer's take-point is 29% rather than 25%. With any gammon threat double even earlier.

3-2 Example



Correct Play: No Double/Take (and redouble)

3-2 Final Roll Double



Correct Play: Double/Pass



The Maths

- If White drops his winning chances are 25% (see table)
- If White takes his winning chances are:
 - $66.7\% \times 0\% = 0\%$ (when Black doesn't roll a single '1')
 - $30\% \times 70 = 21\%$
 - Total = 21%
- By a margin of 4% it is correct for White to drop

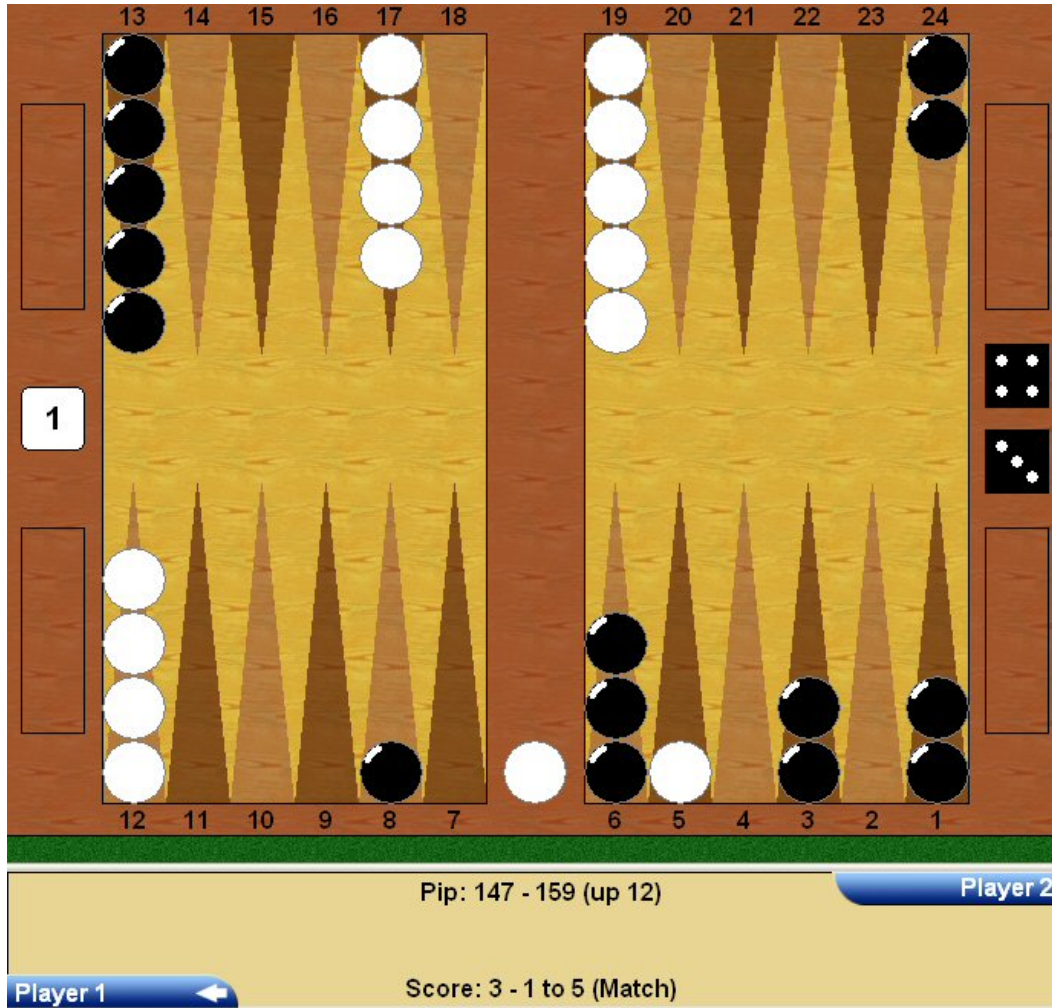


3-1

3-1 makes you a 68% favourite

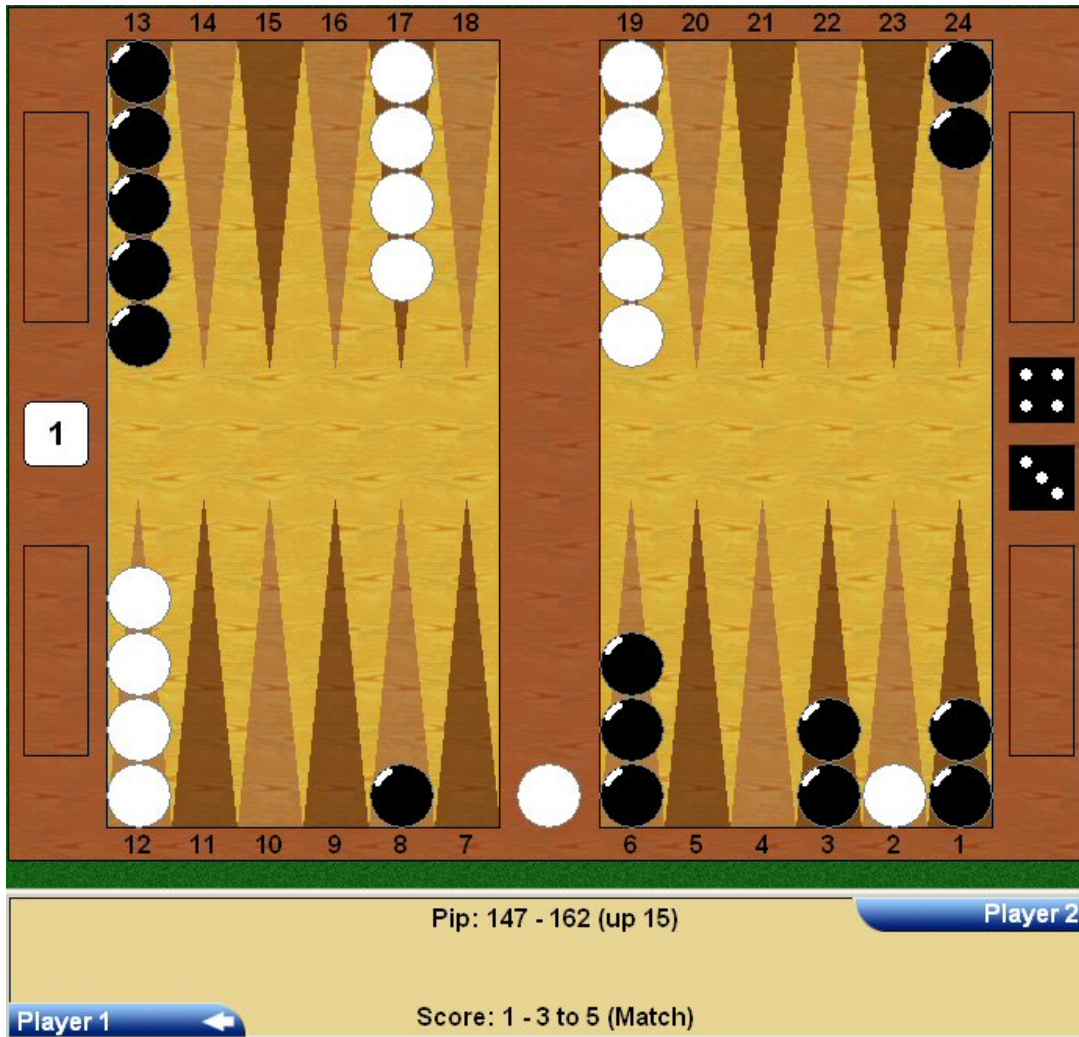
- Leader:
 - Rarely double at this score. He should play for an undoubled gammon. The trailer's take point is very low (17%) because he will redouble to 4 immediately.
- Trailer:
 - In non-gammonish positions be slightly wary as the 2 points give the leader the match exactly (his take point is 20%)
 - With gammonish positions it is now very different and it is the leader who must be wary as the 4 points can be used with optimal efficiency by the trailer.

3-1 Example (1)



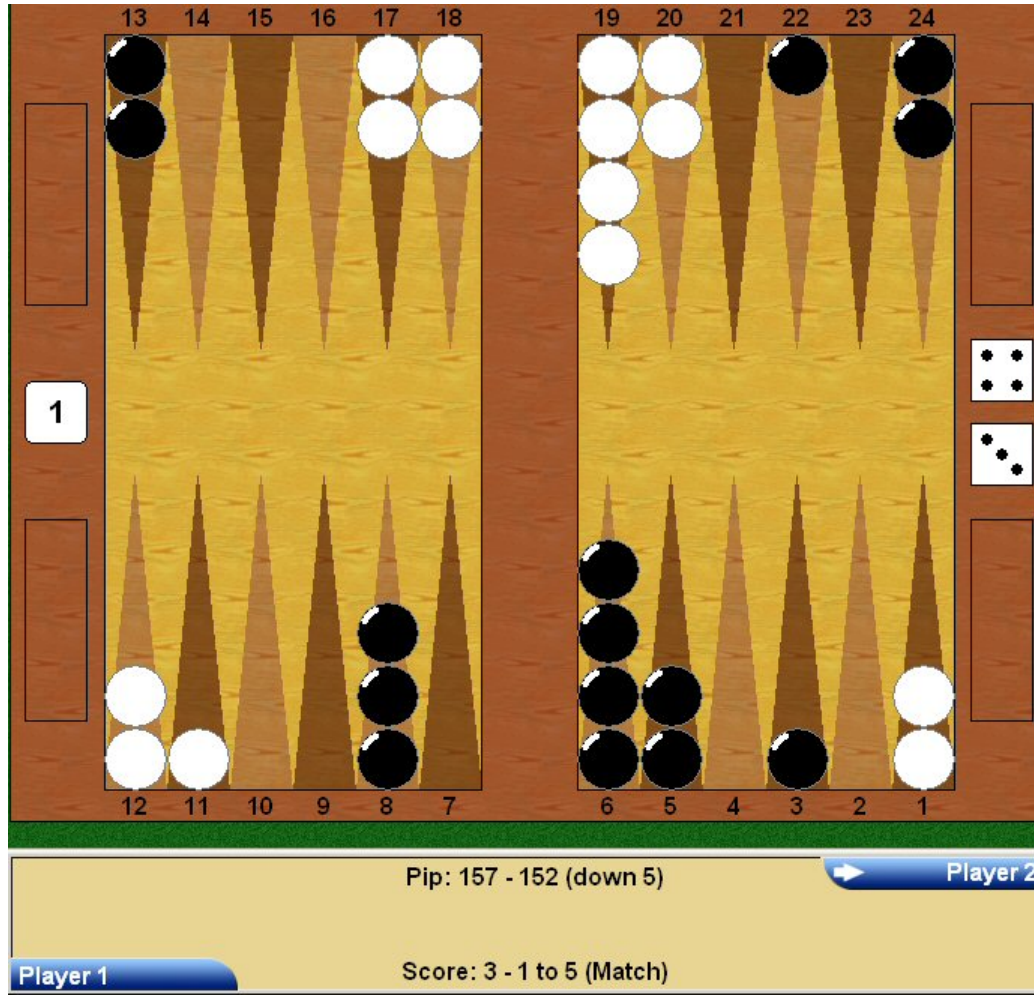
Correct Play: No Double/Take

3-1 Example (2)



Correct Play: Double/Pass

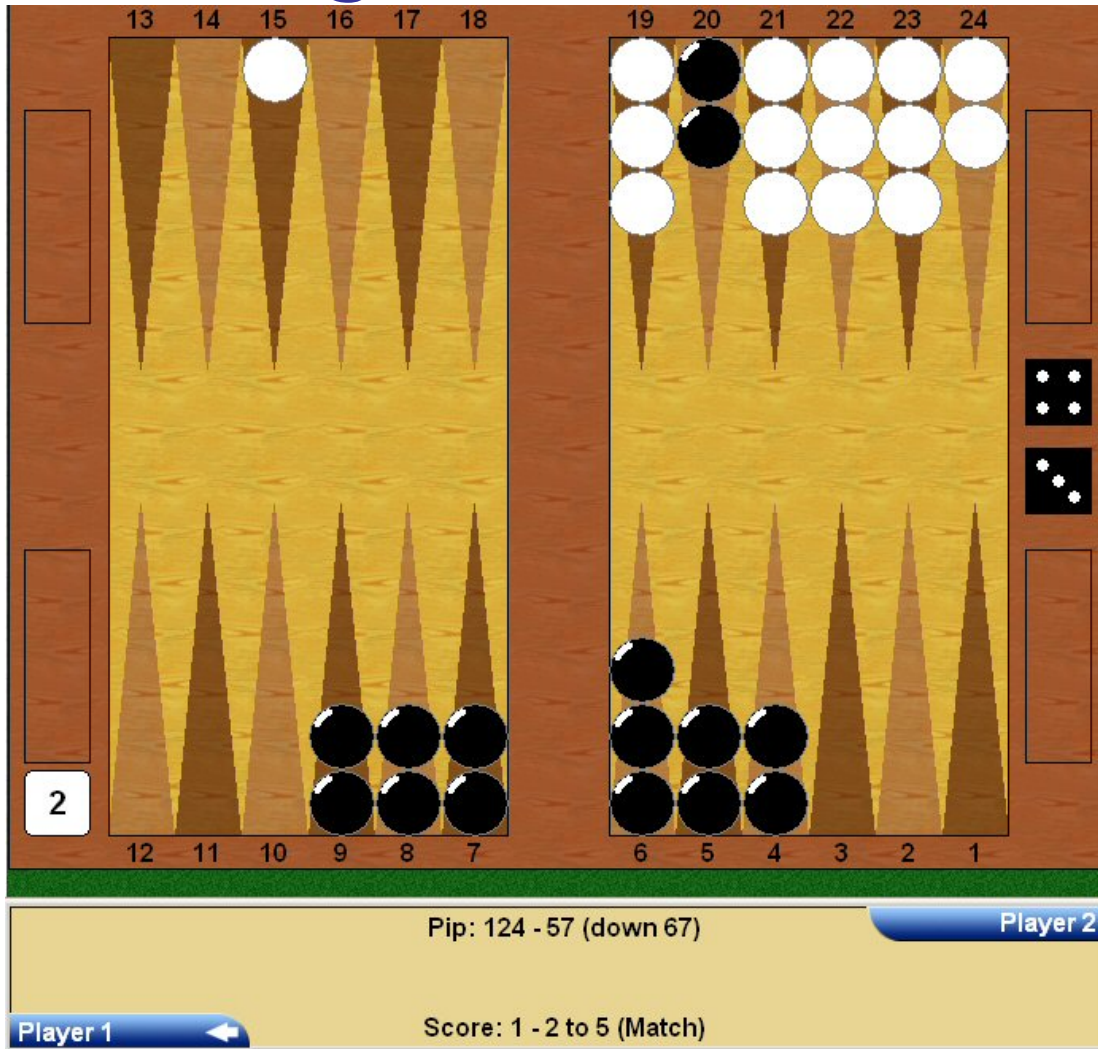
3-1 Example (3)



White is on roll

Correct Play: Double/Pass

Doubling as the underdog!



Correct Play: Double/Take



The Maths

- If black doubles then if he hits he will virtually always win the match. As he hits with 15 numbers that gives him 42% (15/36) match winning chances.
- If black doesn't double his winning chances are:
 - $58\% \times 17\% = 9.9\%$ (when he misses)
 - $42\% \times 60\% = 25.2\%$ (when he hits)
 - TOTAL = 34.9%
- By doubling Black increases his match winning chances by over 7%
- It is clear that White should take the redouble but I've seen people drop redoubles like this!

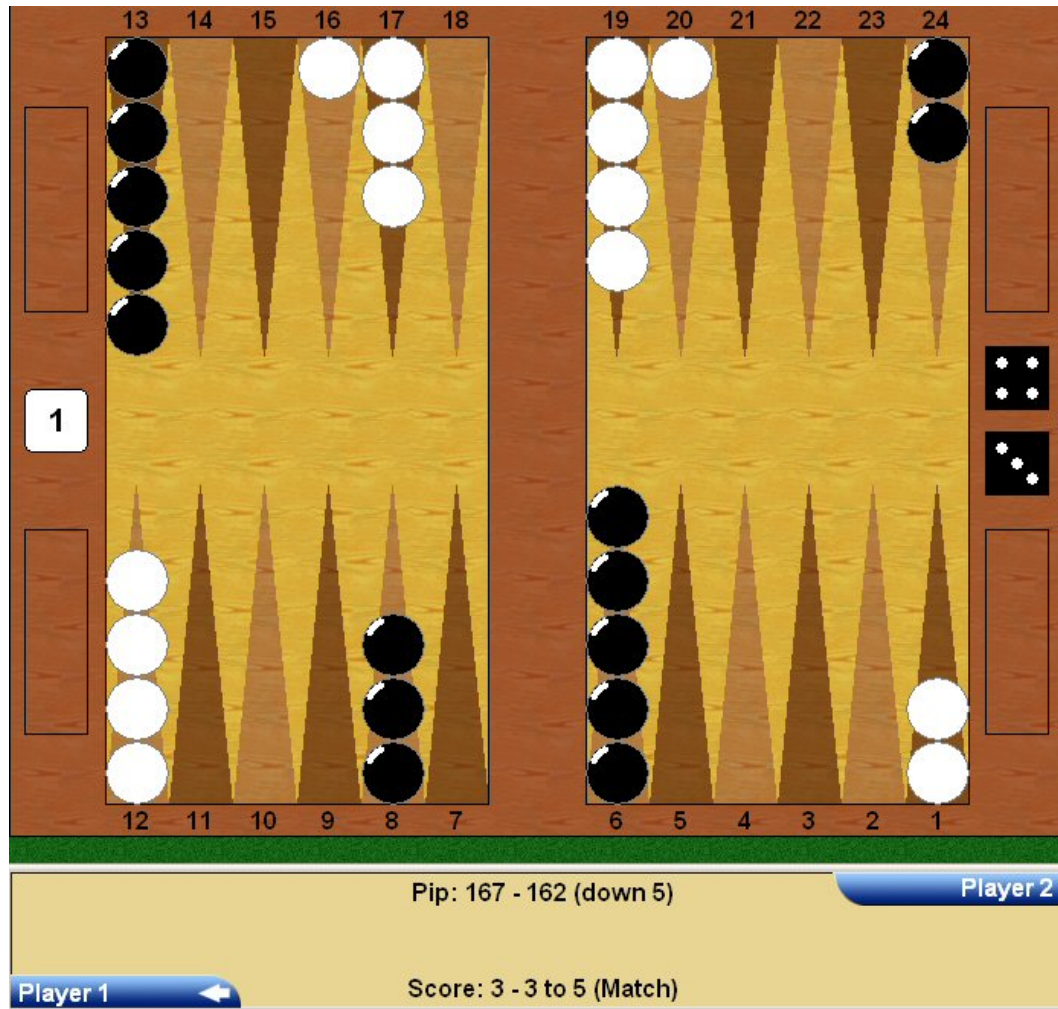


3-3

The take-point at 3-3 is 30%

- Whoever turns the cube first kills gammons and redoubles. The game becomes DMP (Double Match Point)
- You should double if after the next exchange you could lose your market.
- Between two strong players the next game will always be the last
- If your opponent doesn't understand match strategy then it can pay to wait as you may get an incorrect drop.

3-3 Example



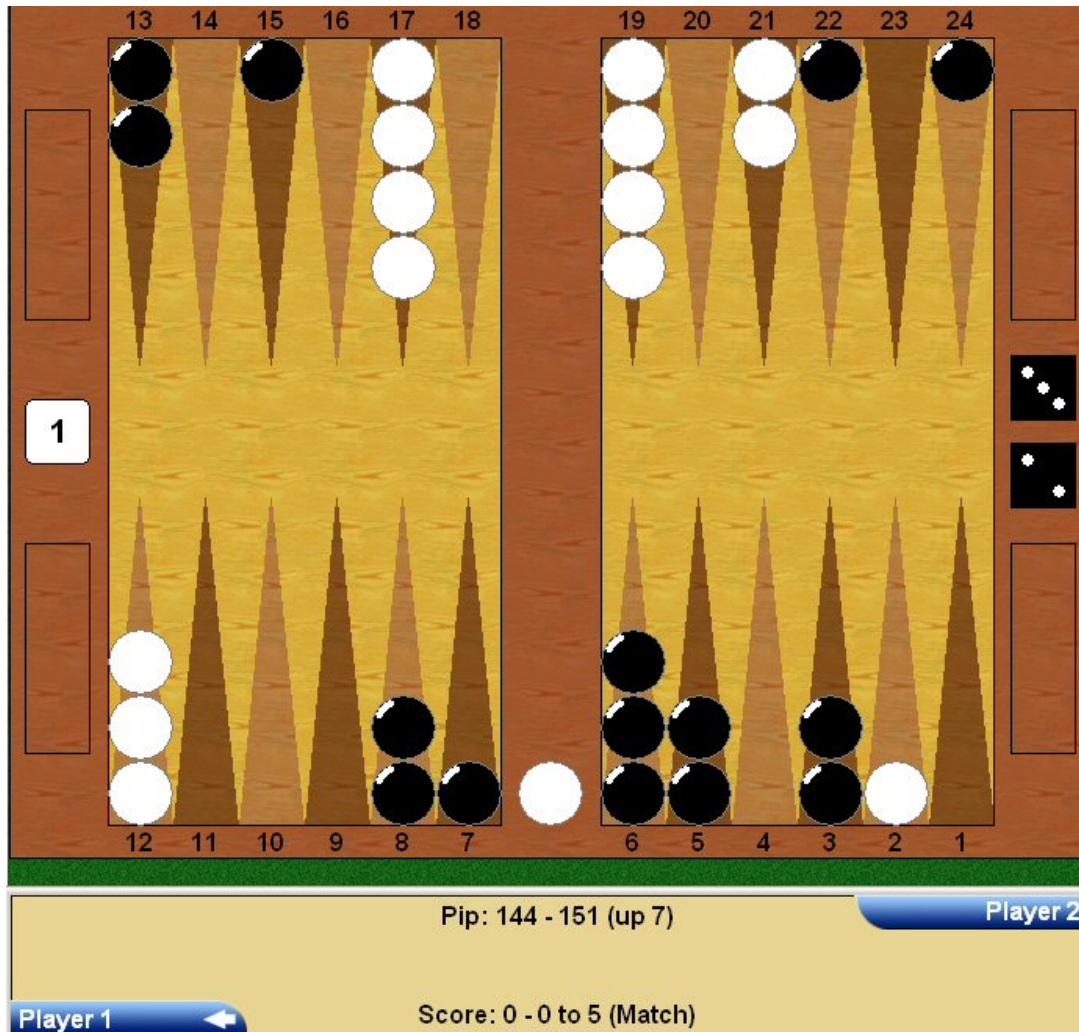
Correct Play: Double/Take



Other Scores

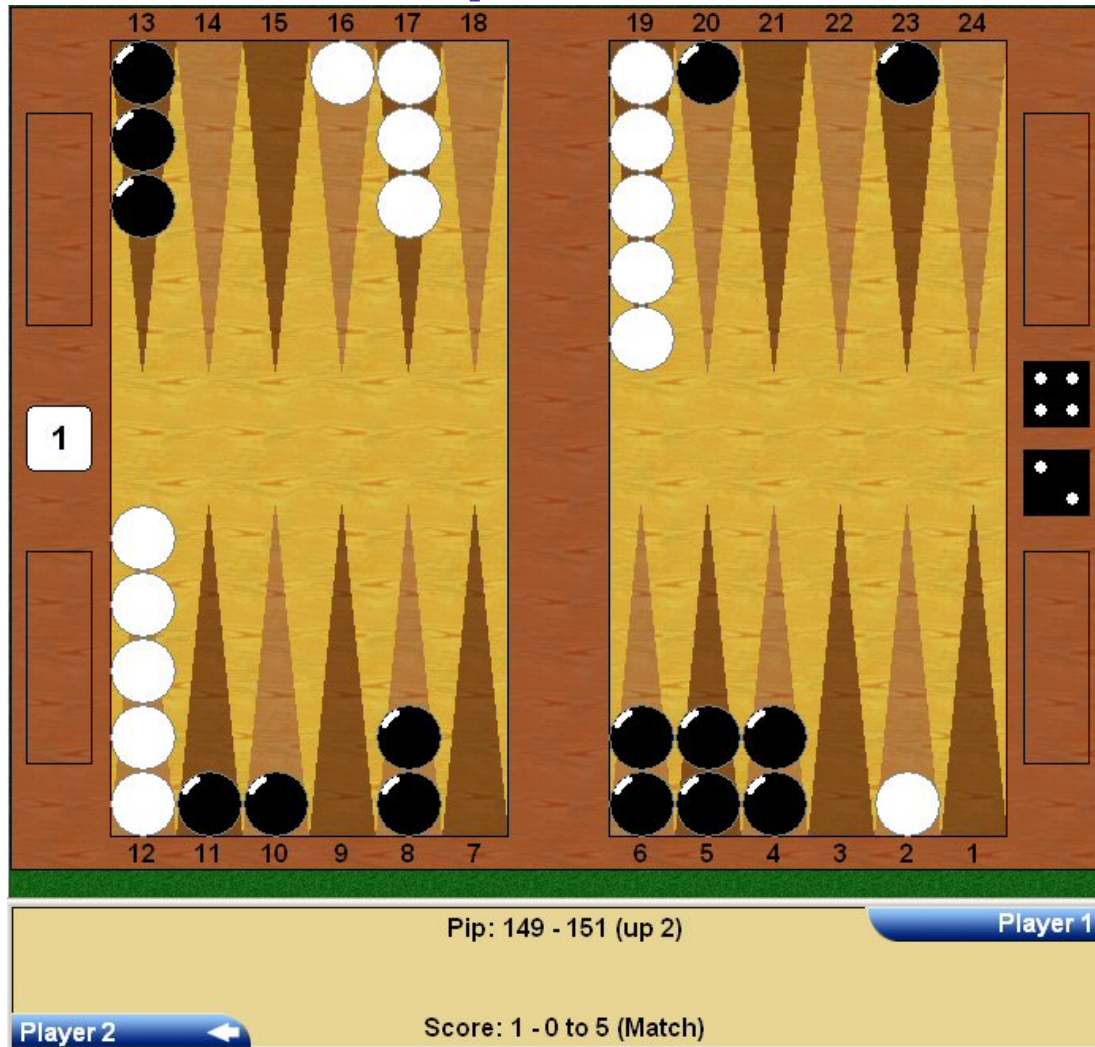
- Be wary of gammons! A take for money is not necessarily a match take – even at 0-0!
- When trailing, prefer to be at an even score when your opponent reaches match point
- Have a strategy for each score before you start the next game

0-0 Example



Correct Play: Double/Drop

1-0 Example



Correct Play: Double/Drop



Double Match Point

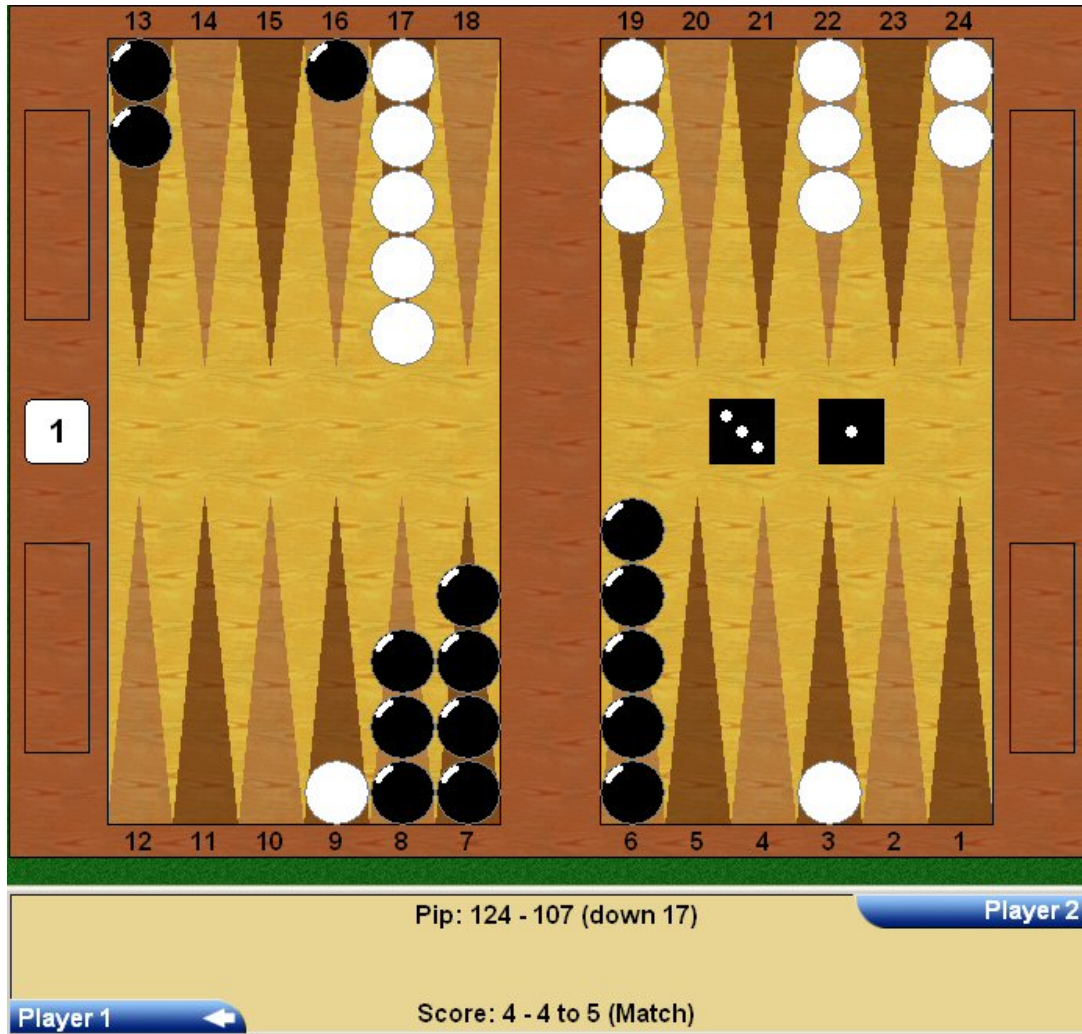
“The play at DMP can be very different from ‘normal’ play.”



DMP Guidelines

- Keep you checkers in play. Blitzes are not the game plan of choice.
- Don't fear back games (but they need to well timed)
- Hold anchors in your opponent's board longer than usual (you can't lose a gammon!)
- Simple running plays are good, e.g. 24/14 with an opening 64

DMP Example



Correct Play: 13/9*

DMP Example (2)



Correct Play: 13/5 or 9/3*, 13/11 or 9/3*, 8/6



Summary

- Learn the key match equities
- Always have a basic plan for the score you have just reached
- Beware of gammons
- Don't fear putting the match on the line if that maximises your match winning chances
- Be bold

“ Given the same amount of intelligence, timidity will do a thousand times more damage than audacity”

- Karl von Clausewitz

Further Reading

- “How to Play Tournament Backgammon”
by Kit Woolsey
- The 5-pt Match – Kit Woolsey
<http://www.bkgm.com/articles/GOL/Aug99/fivept.htm>

